

ISU: Club that backs legal pot can't use Cy on shirt

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A student group at Iowa State University has been banned from using the Cy logo on its T-shirts, following complaints to the university about their appearance in The Des Moines Register.

University administrators met Thursday with NORML ISU, the campus chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, about the use of the school's mascot on their club shirts. The T-shirts say NORML ISU on the front, with Cy's head in place of the "O." On the back is the slogan "Freedom is Norml at ISU" and a marijuana leaf.

After the shirts were featured in a photo in a Nov. 19 story about the possibility of legalizing marijuana in Iowa, the university received email complaints from legislators and others, said Warren Madden, senior vice president for business and finance.

"People started to react, and we started to get feedback indicating that it's an endorsement of the position" to legalize marijuana, Madden said.

The shirt had initially been approved by the school's trademark licensing office. Madden said the office reviews around 9,000 designs a year, both for student groups and commercial companies looking to use the logo. Reviewing licensing policy after complaints started coming in, the office found that the shirt violated rules that university trademarks not be associated with products that have health risks, and that Cy's image cannot be used to stand in for lettering in other groups' marks.

"There's no question about that, we approved those initially," said Thomas Hill, the vice president for student affairs.

"What we want to do is make it very clear that we support the student organization without a doubt," said Thomas Hill, the vice president for student affairs. "But these are positions that Iowa State University will not take a stand on. And we can't afford to be put in that position."

Hill and Madden met with seven members of the group to inform them that they would not be allowed to print the design again.

"It surprised us all," said Josh Montgomery, the group's president. "It's just a hard reality to accept for somebody in my position. We have to do the best with what we have."

Montgomery said in November that the fact that the university allowed the group to put Cy and the marijuana leaf on the same shirt, "It's blowing our minds."

Now, Montgomery said, the group feels unfairly targeted, because other clubs on campus can still use Cy, with university approval. "Even the skeet shooting team is allowed to print Cy holding a musket, plus the bondage club is allowed to print Cy on their T-shirts." Hill said he is not aware of a bondage club using Cy's image.

Madden said nobody was at fault for the initial approval of the design: "Hindsight is obviously 20/20," he said. "They approved it and the students didn't do anything inappropriate or wrong."

While Cy is definitely out, the university has not yet decided how it will proceed with the pot leaf or the use of the ISU letters. Madden said his office will review all proposed designs before the group can print another shirt.